

**BOARD OF VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION**

**SOUTH DAKOTA'S
STATE REHABILITATION
COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF
ACTIVITIES FOR FISCAL
YEAR 2007**

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

**DIVISION OF REHABILITATION
SERVICES**

South Dakota's Board of Vocational Rehabilitation

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The **State Rehabilitation Council** – is established in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Act) and 34 CFR 361.16-361.17 of its implementing regulations.

The **State Rehabilitation Council** - known in South Dakota as the **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation** – gives advice to and works in partnership with the vocational rehabilitation agency in South Dakota - **Division of Rehabilitation Services**.

The **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation** – plays a significant role in ensuring that the vocational rehabilitation program operates effectively.

The **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation** works in partnership with the **Division of Rehabilitation Services** in developing policies, planning activities, evaluating program effectiveness and carrying out other functions related to the vocational rehabilitation program.

The working relationship between the **Board of Vocational Rehabilitation** and the **Division of Rehabilitation Services** is a true partnership focused on ensuring that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate, timely, and effective vocational rehabilitation services.

ABOUT THE BOARD OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION...

MEMBERSHIP: South Dakota's State Rehabilitation Council - Board of Vocational Rehabilitation (Board) members are appointed by the Governor. They serve a term of not more than three years, and they cannot serve more than two consecutive three-year terms. The two-term limit does not apply to the representative of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) or the American Indian vocational rehabilitation programs. The Board must have a minimum of 15 members, and the majority of members must be individuals with disabilities and not employed by the designated state unit (Division of Rehabilitation Services).

The Governor selects members after the Board solicits recommendations from individuals, organizations representing people with a broad range of disabilities and organizations interested in individuals with disabilities. The Board solicited nominations statewide during the month of April and once compiled, they were forwarded to the Governor for his consideration and action. In August, three individuals were appointed to serve on the Board and two current members were reappointed. Currently, the Board meets all the composition requirements within the Rehabilitation Act.

MEETINGS: Board meetings are held at least four times a year, publicly announced, open and accessible to the public. The Board may also hold hearings and forums, as they deem necessary. Special meetings may be called by the Chairperson, in cooperation with Division and Board staff, as stipulated in the bylaws. Meetings held during the reporting period were:

December 11-12, 2006; Sioux Falls
March 22-23, 2007; Rapid City
June 7-8, 2007; Sioux Falls
September 13-14, 2007; Pierre

COMMITTEES: There are three standing committees through which the Board conducts a good deal of its work. Board members use conference calls and face-to-face meetings, prior to or during quarterly meetings, to conduct their business. The work of the committees is reported out at each meeting for the full Board's consideration and action. These committees are noted below, along with their assigned activities.

Executive Committee: This committee may act on behalf of the Board to perform necessary business matters between regular meetings, provided their actions receive concurrence of the full Board. They also bring recommendations to the full Board on the following: Annual Report, State Plan, State goals and priorities, Board staff support agreement, new member orientation, legislative agenda and meeting agendas.

Consumer Services Committee: Their role includes involvement with the consumer satisfaction survey, review of State goals and strategies, recommendation of systems change priorities, policy review and recommendations and public meeting topics and process.

Public Awareness Committee: This committee focuses on National Disability Employment Awareness Month activities and Governor's Awards nominations and luncheon.

BOARD ACTIVITIES IN 2007...

State Plan Activities

The State Plan submission process and Order of Selection have been discussion items at each meeting during this reporting period. Implementation of the Order of Selection occurred on October 1, 2006, reporting included consumers found eligible for services, case service expenditures, and the number of eligible individuals assigned to one of

the three priority categories (individuals with the most significant disabilities, individuals with significant disabilities and individuals with disabilities). The Division reported on case file reviews being conducted to ensure appropriate priority category assignment and to ensure appropriate staff training needs were being met. Concerns raised by the Board prompted a survey of consumers to ensure appropriate services or referrals were being provided.

During this reporting period there was the ability to adjust the priority categories, allowing the Division to open up the waiting list and serve additional consumers. The Division was vigilant in monitoring the implementation of the Order of Selection and keeping the Board informed on this critical issue.

The Board and the Division undertook a major task of examining the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. Members of the Consumer Services Committee agreed to take on the task of reviewing and digesting information which included: public meeting comments, consumer satisfaction survey results, statewide needs assessment, case file reviews and other pertinent results (i.e., Freedom to Work Survey, Department of Transportation fiscal year end data, and input captured at the Mid-Winter conference). This involved identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the agency, which also entailed outlining new goals, strategies and action steps. This became the foundation for working on the State Plan document and related attachments.

The process of preparing the State Plan and related documents was shared not only with members of the Board but with the Division's field offices and general public for additional input and comment. It should be noted that these documents and draft policies were posted on the Division's website for further review and comment. The State Plan document was also reviewed and supported by the Workforce Development Council and then approval was received from the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

The Board would be negligent if it did not report on the Rehabilitation Services Administration onsite review. This process involved a visit with Rehabilitation Services Administration staff in 2006 and again in

2007, participation in stakeholders input and review processes, providing input on promising practices and areas for improvement, developing goals and strategies to address performance issues and any need for technical assistance. This process brought to life the strengths of the agency as well as the challenges it faces.

The Board and Division face the continual challenge of increasing wages for individuals with disabilities, implementing the Order of Selection consistently throughout the state, and identifying employment opportunities in higher paying occupations in a rural state such as South Dakota.

Public Meetings

The Board and Division have set a course to obtain public comment by alternative methods. The old-fashioned approach of “scheduling, advertising, and please come to our meeting” was not producing desired results. Consumer turnout was very low or lacking. Dialogue was needed from all customers of vocational rehabilitation services - not only individuals with disabilities, family members and providers but also business owners, employers and human resource managers. There is also opportunity to provide public comment at any Board meeting, but again, very few people from the general public attend and provide comment.

During this reporting period the following opportunities were offered:

- The Board and the Division hosted a meeting in conjunction with a training event, which targeted a broad audience. Volunteers from the Aberdeen Area Human Resource Association agreed to facilitate dialogue and members of the Board, Board of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and Freedom to Work Leadership Council (SD’s Medicaid Infrastructure Project) along with staff of these groups served as notetakers. There were four sets of dialogue questions available specific to employers/human resource managers, providers, family members and persons with disabilities. There were over ninety people present during this function and written comments were also invited.

- The Board and Division hosted an evening banquet with consumers and staff of a mental health center (Behavior Management Systems in Rapid City). This event was timed specifically to coincide with the consumer job club meeting. The meeting drew approximately thirty consumers. This type of forum allowed very frank dialogue regarding vocational rehabilitation services, training needs, peer support, how services could be improved, and what accomplishments could be reached if services or activities could be done differently. Comments were collected and discussed the next day during the Board's regular meeting.
- The Board and Division hosted a luncheon with members of PLANS (Persons Leadng Accessible Networks of Supports). This was an informational exchange of providing background information of whom and what each other does. The environment was informal resulting in open dialogue at each table and comments were collected.
- The Board and Division will also send representatives to the Partners in Policymaking graduation session in April to listen to comments. This is a facilitated discussion on a variety of topics, which impact persons living with a disability (i.e., vocational rehabilitation, independent living, transportation, housing, Social Security, and education).
- Future "input gathering" opportunities are being explored and discussed.

Board Presentations

Alan Davis, South Dakota State University presented at the Boards December meeting on a survey that he conducted regarding threats made to vocational rehabilitation counselors. After reviewing the results, he recommended that counselors would benefit from added training in handling crisis situations. This recommendation was acted upon, by including a training session at the Fall Conference held in October.

Shelly Pfaff, South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, also presented at the Board's December meeting. She provided an overview of the 'United We Ride' grant, which the Department of Transportation received funding to develop a framework for action for transit services in South Dakota. Shelly also returned in March and provided an overview of legislative items the Coalition tracked (i.e., minimum wage, health insurance, Medicaid, cochlear implants, tax refunds for persons with disabilities and the elderly, and People First Language bill).

Mike Frost with the Business Leadership Network (BLN) along with Mike Herrlien provided an overview of the BLN and related activities. The focus is primarily promoting best practices for the employment of persons with disabilities, networking and building effective relationships between employers and community partners. The overview also included initiatives in the Sioux Falls area: luncheons recognizing employers and employees with disabilities, training sessions, mentoring day, and leadership round table discussions.

Coordination of Activities with other Councils/Boards within the State

It is a priority of the Board and the Division to have standing agenda items at each meeting to keep abreast of activities supporting people with disabilities becoming self-sufficient. Agenda items related to the coordination efforts include: Workforce Development Council; Freedom to Work Project (South Dakota's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant); Statewide Independent Living Council; Business Leadership Network; Transition Services Liaison Project; Teacher Institute; Youth Leadership Forum; and South Dakota Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (formerly known as the Benefits, Planning, Assistance and Outreach for SSI & SSDI Beneficiaries program).

Throughout this reporting period the Board has also asked for updates regarding the South Dakota Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, otherwise known as the Freedom to Work Project. These updates have provided information on: Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD), Mike Walling "Benefits and Employment" training sessions,

development and progress of the Career Development Team and the Employer Resource Networks. The Board has been very supportive of this “systems change grant” due to the nature of work focused on addressing barriers on all fronts (family members, consumers, employers, benefits, and providers), which might impact persons with disabilities who are seeking employment or to maintain employment.

Other collaborative efforts:

- ☆ Governor’s Awards Luncheon – This is an annual luncheon held to recognize the efforts of individuals, employers, and organizations for their contributions to the employment of persons with disabilities. The Boards of Vocational Rehabilitation and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired, Divisions of Rehabilitation Services and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and Department of Human Services co-sponsored this year’s event.
- ☆ National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) – These community events are statewide and they provide quality information and education to the public regarding the strengths and talents that people with disabilities bring to the workforce. In addition to the Board and Division, more community rehabilitation programs and disability related organizations are contributing support to these activities i.e., Mayors Committees, One-Stop Career Centers, Centers for Independent Living, Adaptabilities, and SD Achieve.
- ☆ Solicitation for Nominations – The Board and the Statewide Independent Living Council coordinated efforts to disseminate nomination packets during the month of April. Nomination forms for the Board and SILC were disseminated to hundreds of disability organizations, State agencies, Governor appointed Boards and Councils, and other interested individuals.
- ☆ Attendance at Training Events – The Board provided financial support to members to attend various functions across the state. Members participated at Mid-Winter Conference, Fall Conference,

and NDEAM sponsored events. This provided members with the opportunity to listen and learn about various issues impacting people with disabilities reaching their career and employment goals.

- ☆ Consumer Attendance at Training Events – Two consumers applied for and received Board financial support to attend training events pertinent to their vocational rehabilitation goal. This was the first time the Board utilized a new policy to assist individuals with disabilities to participate in a training event that will assist them in preparing, obtaining, maintaining or retaining employment.

Board of Vocational Rehabilitation Staff Support Agreement:

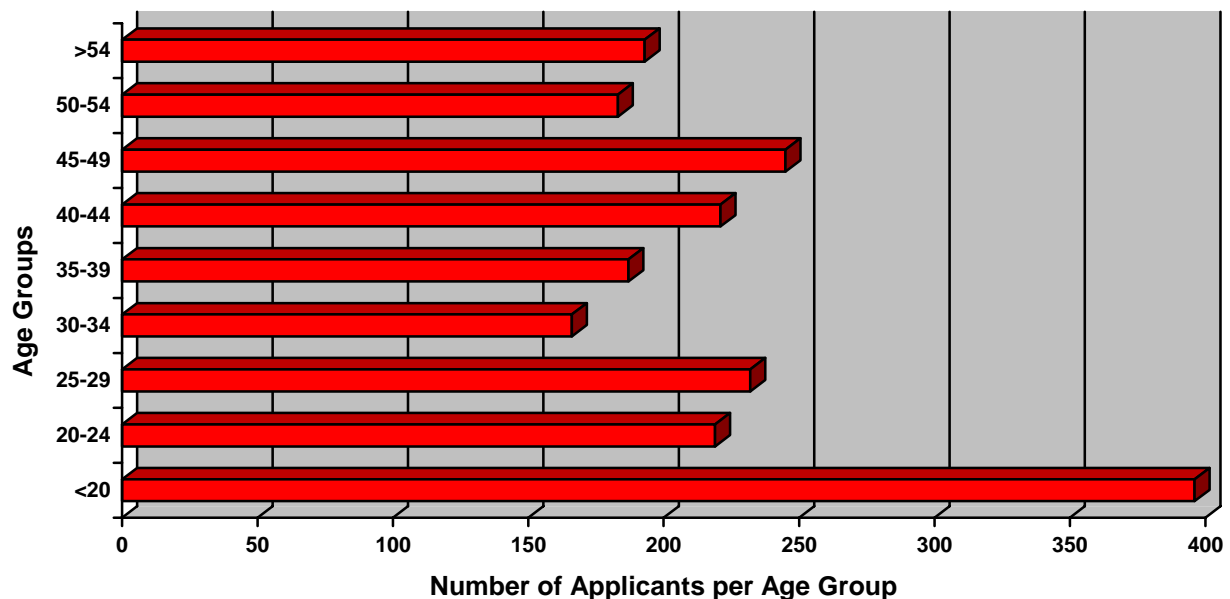
An agreement is in place between the Division of Rehabilitation Services and South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities to provide staff support to the Board and the Statewide Independent Living Council. This contract was reviewed and re-negotiated. Within this contract the Board has included funds to support various strategic planning activities i.e., public forums, NDEAM activities, Governor's Awards, and board member attendance at various conferences pertinent to vocational rehabilitation services. This contract arrangement was noted as a strength in the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Fiscal Year 2007 Monitoring Report.

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DRS) IN 2007...

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program is a comprehensive coordinated program designed to assist individuals with significant disabilities in making career decisions and reaching their employment goals.

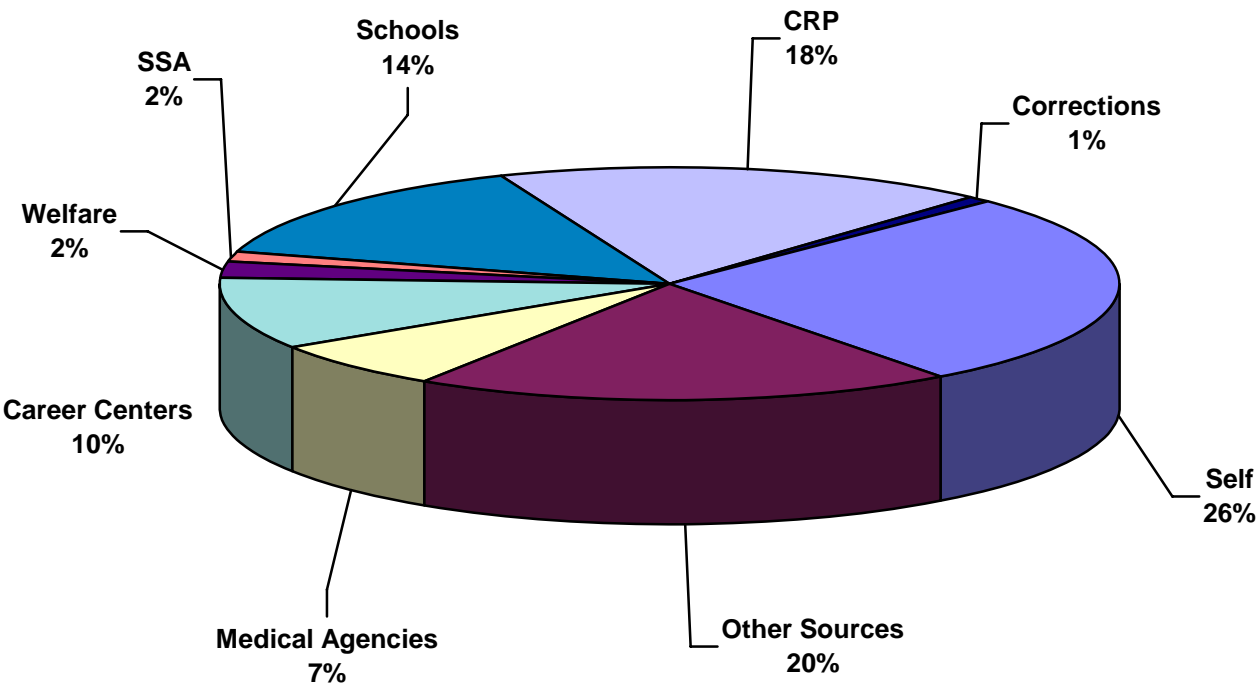
The Division had a total of 2,043 individuals apply for vocational rehabilitation services in fiscal year 2007. The average age of the applicant was 35.4 years of age and youth with disabilities was the largest age group served (less than 20 years of age). The following chart depicts the number of applicants served per age group.

**Number of Applicants Per Age Group
(10/1/2006 to 9/30/2007)**

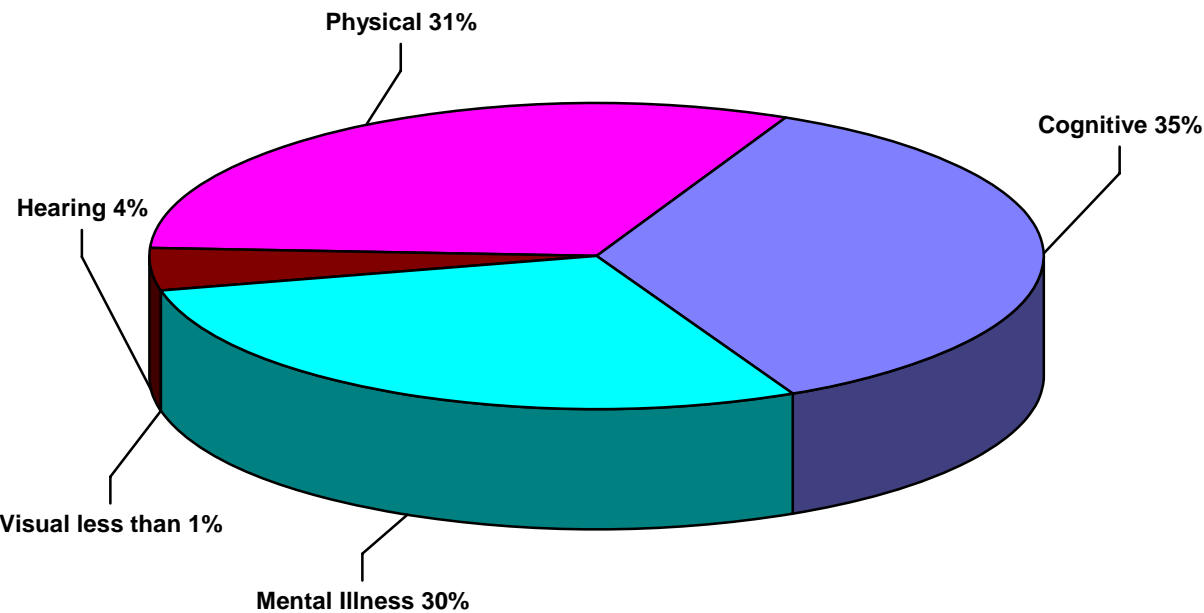


The Division of Rehabilitation Services tracks the source of referral when an individual applies for services. The largest referral source for applicants is the individual themselves (self-referral); the other categories are depicted below in the pie chart:

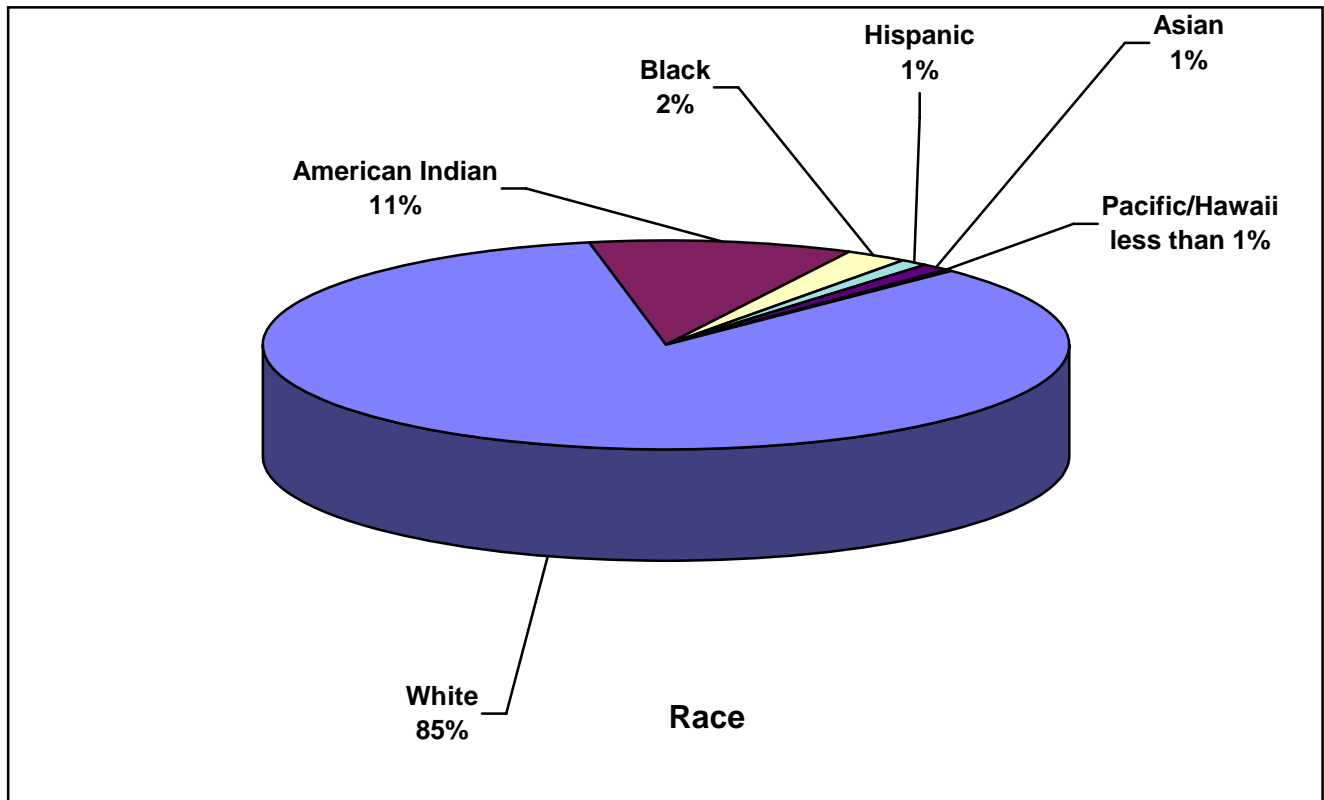
Referrals to the Division during 10/01/2006 – 09/30/2007



The primary impairments of eligible individuals seeking vocational rehabilitation services included:



The Division serves a diverse population as reflected below in the pie chart.



In addition to vocational rehabilitation services, consumers receive other types of assistance from a vast array of providers. The following chart reflects a broad array of entities that the Division works with to fulfill the consumer's employment goals.

Programs Consumers are Involved With	Count
Career Centers	288
Mental Health Center	239
Supported Employment	181
Social Services	174
Adjustment Training Center	111
Career Learning Center	70
Drug/Alcohol Treatment	69
Probation/Parole	55
Treatment Facility (Residential)	58
Another State VR Agency	21
Honorably Discharged Veteran	15
Independent Living Center	10
Workforce Investment Act	11
Other	10

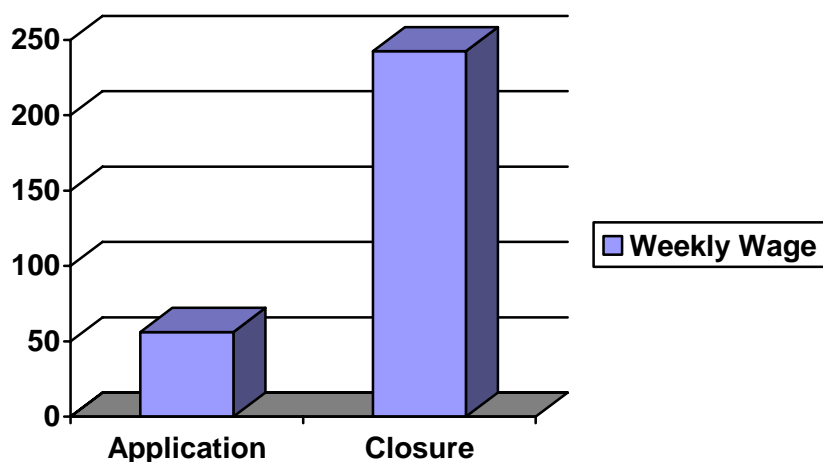
In fiscal year 2007, the average annual income of consumers rehabilitated was \$12,609. Prior to rehabilitation, the average income was \$2,924. At 63.5%, South Dakota ranks as the second highest state in the nation concerning the employment rate of people with disabilities who are working. The national average is 48.7%.

FY 07 Performance Outcomes

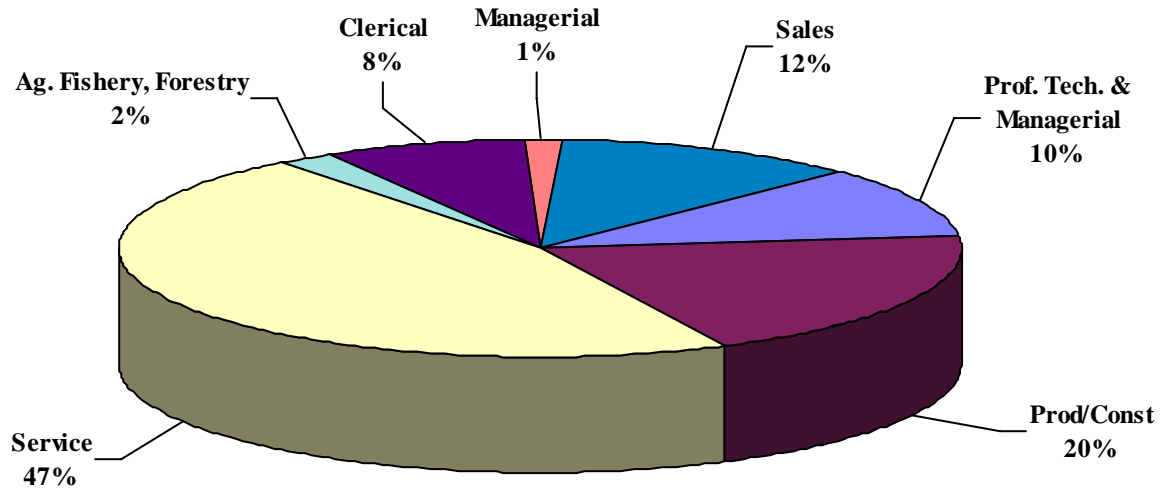
Performance Description	At Application	At Closure	Percent of Improvement
Increase in individuals obtaining medical insurance through employment	47	163	347%
Increase in individuals where wages are primary source of support	133	648	482%
Increase of weekly wages	\$56.24	\$242.49	431%

After receiving services from VR and at time of closure, there was an increase in consumer's wages and hours worked per week in competitive employment. A total of 860 individuals were successfully employed and 97% of these individuals were identified as having significant disabilities.

The average hourly wage of individuals employed was \$8.52 after receiving services.



Success is assisting consumers to meet their employment goals. The following chart depicts occupational fields that consumers have selected.



Occupations at Closure

Project Skills

Many students with significant disabilities do not have an opportunity to gain paid employment experience while in high school. This is an important learning, maturing, and socializing experience. Although willing, most employers cannot afford the supports these students frequently require on their first job.

The State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies - Divisions of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) fund a program entitled "Project Skills" to address this need. Project Skills is a cooperative arrangement between State VR Agencies and the local school systems. The State VR Agencies fund the wages, worker's compensation and FICA while the schools provide job development, job coaching and follow-along services for the student at the job site.

Program Demographics	
Total Work Experiences	307
Percent of Participants with Significant Disabilities	97%
Total Wages & Benefits Paid	\$264,330
Number of Contract Agencies	43
Number of Schools Participating in Program	137